

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002105

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM SOCI ASEC ZI
SUBJECT: VIOLENCE IN REDCLIFF

Classified By: Political Officer Win Dayton under Section 1.5(b)(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Inter-party violence in Redcliff over the weekend reportedly left the homes of eight MDC members and two former ZANU-PF urban councilors damaged and one former ZANU-PF urban councilor (the father of an Embassy FSN) hospitalized. Hundreds of MDC supporters assaulted a senior ZANU-PF local official on October 17, ostensibly in response to ZANU-PF attacks on the homes of four MDC supporters. ZANU-PF responded with attacks on four more MDC houses. Eleven MDC youths and two ZANU-PF youths have been arrested and remain in jail, pending posting of bail. Redcliff is a historical hot spot and we have not seen evidence that Redcliff's experience will spread; nonetheless, sporadic localized violence in Zimbabwe is likely to continue, particularly as MDC rank and file chafe under the leadership's generally pacifist approach. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Embassy FSN recounted to poloff on October 22 an account of an October 17 attack on her father, Bride Nyereyegona, by MDC supporters in the Midlands town of Redcliff. By way of background, the FSN is not a party member and casts herself as an apolitical critic of the government. She describes her father as a dyed-in-the-wool ZANU-PF leader in Midlands province -- a former mayor and urban councilor who had lost his council seat to an MDC candidate in the August election. She said she and her father had "agreed to disagree" on political issues and ZANU-PF.

¶3. (C) According to the FSN, her father was at his liquor store in Redcliff on October 17, when up to 400 MDC supporters surged into and around his store. Several of them began to beat him, eventually leaving him cut, bruised, unconscious, and short several teeth. During the beating, he heard one assailant say they would kill him but another urged that he be left alone. Eventually, the crowd left him and proceeded without him to his home about 500 meters away, where they destroyed a wall inside his home, broke windows, and stoned his car. She said that the homes of two other ZANU-PF members were attacked by MDC supporters the same night. Nyereyegona was hospitalized until Sunday and released. Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Rugare Gumba was among the steady flow of ZANU-PF well-wishers who visited Nyereyegona in a show of party support. The FSN said her father did not suggest a pretext for the attack other than that he was a ZANU-PF leader and a target for MDC elements emboldened by their urban council victories. He had charged that one of the trucks used to bring in MDC activists from out of town belonged to one of the current MDC councilors.

¶4. (C) Abednigo Malinga, MDC MP for Silobela, who resides in Redcliff and was there during the weekend, provided additional details and context to poloff on October 22. According to Malinga, ZANU-PF youths had started the latest round of violence with attacks on the separate homes of two MDC city councilors and two party activists on October 16. The homes were stoned, with home entries and furniture broken up in two cases. Malinga said the MDC's youth element in the area "had had enough." They retaliated by going after the homes of the two ZANU-PF local leaders believed to have been responsible for organizing the initial attacks and previous ones during pre-election periods dating back to 2000. One of them was roughed up. ZANU-PF responded by attacking the homes of four more MDC activists later Friday night. On October 18, police arrested 11 MDC youths and two ZANU-PF youths in connection with the attacks. All received hearings on October 21 and remain in jail pending posting of ZD100,000 (USD17.70 at the parallel market exchange rate -- relatively high bail by historical local standards). Bail conditions include a prohibition against entering the township where the trouble occurred and a requirement that each report to the police every Friday.

¶5. (C) Malinga attributed the violence to central direction by ZANU-PF superiors and police inability and/or unwillingness to control the situation. He said he had called police on innumerable occasions in the past to report violence against him or fellow party members but the police had never taken action. Most recently, he reported to police

a call from an irate local war veteran leader the night of October 17 in which the veteran said the violence commenced by the MDC would end up at Malinga's doorstep. Malinga said he urged the veteran to join him in trying to calm their respective constituents -- to no avail. Malinga said he had civil relations with several ZANU-PF local leaders but found them powerless to affect the situation in view of the involvement of outside elements. Malinga was unable to offer evidence of outside direction other than that ZANU-PF provided food and resources to the youths causing trouble in the area. Malinga asserted that the MDC leadership had firm control of its youth membership and would not permit them to get "out of hand", notwithstanding the experiences of last weekend. He said nearby Kwekwe was experiencing similar violence in the wake of urban council elections (ZANU-PF won most council seats there in one of the more problematic elections here) but he was unaware of other flashpoints since the elections.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: It remains unclear the extent to which recent localized violence against the opposition is directed by senior government or ruling party officials as Malinga suggests; certainly the climate of impunity continues to be fostered and sanctioned at the highest levels. The MDC leadership retains non-violence as a central plank in its national platform but may have increasing difficulty keeping a lid on the frustrations of its rank and file, particularly as talks on talks show little progress. For now, we expect violence to remain sporadic and localized but do not discount the possibility that retaliation could escalate and spread, spurred in part by the absence of media coverage and effective police control.

SULLIVAN